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The Bradford Manuscript

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THE BRADFORD MANUSCRIPT.

ARRIE G. SHERMAN.

CLASS OF '99

THE BRADFORD MANUSCRIPT.

To many people the return of the Bradford Manuscript is a fresh discovery in colonial history. This record has often been called "the log of the Mayflower." The fact is, however, that Governor Bradford undertook its preparation long after the arrival of the Pilgrims, and it cannot be considered in any sense a log, or daily journal, of that vessel.

It is of great value as a record, being a history of the Plymouth colony from its formation down to the year 1647. The discovery in 1855 of the original manuscript of Governor Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantations may be regarded as a matter of great importance. It was known that such a history had been written, although never published. It has been in print since 1856, through the public spirit of the Massachusetts Historical Society, which obtained a transcript of the document from London and printed it in the society's proceedings the same year. The new edition, issued in 1896 in Boston, is copied from that of 1856. Says Senator Hoar "This book is put forth that the public may know what manner of men the pilgrims were, through what perils they passed, and how much we of to-day owe to their devotion and determination."

The character of these pioneers was largely formed in England, and in Holland to which they removed in 1608. The city of Amsterdam was the place they selected for residence, for various reasons; one being that it had stood for Protestantism and liberty of speech, and drew to itself from many lands those who valued their freedom civil or religious. They remained in this place, and Leyden to which they afterwards removed, about thirteen years; and then with great energy and in the face of a series of discouragements, decided to seek a home in a new country.

In July 1620 they went to Southampton, where they took passage in the Mayflower, and after a stormy voyage, reached Cape Cod harbor. The men on board the ship on November 11th entered into a compact which became the basis of the constitution of the colony. December 21st they landed at Plymouth, and decided that the colony should make this a place of settlement. In the month of April, 1621, Governor Carver died, and William Bradford was appointed his successor, although not yet recovered from a severe illness. The colonists depended upon the wisdom of Bradford in all things, as he showed in this new position of authority his ability to rule.

Having come upon the bleak New-England coast in the midst of winter, they suffered many hardships, and houses had to be

built when shelter was most needed, nearly half of their number died, so that only about fifty remained. They had to depend altogether upon their own exertions to supply themselves with everything needful.

Soon after their arrival, they had a visit from an Indian named Samoset; and as Governor Bradford and the colony were friendly to him, he was of great help in showing them how to cultivate the soil in this new country. But with all Bradford's assistance and advice, the colony suffered great hardships; some were discontented; and foes from without also interfered with the general peace.

But in September, 1621, "they began to gather in their small harvest and to fit up their dwellings before winter. As they had all recovered in health and strength, and had all things needful, subsisting on fish, fowl, and venison." While affairs were in this condition, the Governor learned that Massasoit, an Indian chief, whom all the Indians greatly respected, was ill. As they were able to send him such things as were conducive to his recovery, he showed his gratitude by informing them of a conspiracy against the colony by hostile Indians, the execution of which through his disclosures they were able to prevent.

In 1624 the colony having grown, Governor Bradford desired them to increase the number of his assistants from two to five, saying, "if it was an honor others should share it, and if it was a burden they should help bear it." Four years later occurred a fearful earthquake, which was supposed to affect vegetation for two or three years, also causing early frosts, which prevented the Indian corn from maturing.

The character of William Bradford as seen in this narrative, is one of great piety and wisdom. He proved his intellectual capacity by giving us a History of Plymouth Plantations, and to this simple historian, we owe a debt of gratitude for the records he preserved and the story he told.

It is a matter of regret that no picture of Governor Bradford exists, but in those early days, Plymouth would have been a poor place for portrait painters in the struggle for daily bread. His likeness we must seek in his History; and "wherever his manuscripts are read, it will make a deep impression on the reader as he thinks of the story of suffering, of sorrow, of peril, and of exile, which the hand of the great leader and founder of America has traced on its pages."